

VZCZCXRO9150  
RR RUEHGR  
DE RUEHPO #0264 1491940  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 291940Z MAY 07  
FM AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9380  
INFO RUCNCOM/EC CARICOM COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS PARAMARIBO 000264

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DEPT FOR WHA/CAR - LLUFTIG

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KCRM](#) [PGOV](#) [NS](#)

SUBJECT: AMNESTY FOR SURINAME'S FORMER MILITARY STRONGMAN, DESI  
BOUTERSE?

¶1. (U) During the week ending May 25, Suriname's ruling New Front plus coalition parties held high-level talks concerning a possible referendum to allow the Surinamese electorate the right to decide whether suspects of the December 8 (1982) murders should be granted amnesty. The chief proponent of the amnesty referendum is Speaker of Parliament Paul Somohardjo, who in April broke ranks with the rest of the coalition, arguing the Surinamese nation should decide what happens to the suspects, not 51 members in Parliament.

¶2. (U) Somohardjo argued that "amnesty will bring more closure than holding a criminal trial, since suspects would be more willing to reveal the truth surrounding the murders if they know they will not be imprisoned". Not surprisingly, the NDP and its Chairman, principal suspect Desi Bouterse, fully support Somohardjo in his call for a referendum. [Note: The NDP is the biggest party in Suriname and its members would most likely provide a majority of votes if a referendum was held. End note]. Seven other parties in the ruling coalition disagree with Somohardjo on this issue, arguing that "Justice should run its course."

¶3. (U) After their six-plus hours-long meeting last week, none of the ruling coalition leaders was willing to comment on the amnesty issue. However, Ramdien Sardjoe, Vice President and Chairman of the United Reform Party (VHP), would confirm that the amnesty issue had been discussed. Although parties were as yet not in full agreement, he noted vaguely that "some" of the disagreements had been cleared up. Still unknown is when-or whether-the amnesty referendum proposal will be placed on the Parliament's agenda. Clearly, the Embassy will continue to monitor this issue closely, particularly as it may impact the future activities of Suriname's infamous former military strongman, now parliamentarian, Desi Bouterse.

SCHREIBER HUGHES